

Testimony Concerning Early and Absentee Voting
Government Administration and Elections Committee Public Hearing February 22, 2023

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Flexer and Rep. Blumenthal, Vice-Chairs Sen. Slap and Rep. Morin-Bello, Ranking Members Sen. Sampson and Rep. Mastrofrancesco, and Distinguished Members of the GAE Committee: My name is Karen Edwards. I live in Stamford. I am a member of Indivisible Stamford. I am professor of Public Health and Adjunct Associate Professor of Pediatrics. I am a parent and a retired pediatrician/public health professional. **I am writing to express my support of S.B. No. 1064, H.B. No. 5004, S.J. No. 29, H.J. No. 1, and H.B. No. 6693. I also conditionally support S.B. No. 1057.**

Connecticut voters overwhelmingly supported the Constitutional amendment to allow early voting and by doing so sent a strong message -- to increase access to voting. Now is the time to expeditiously implement **early voting**, ahead of the 2024 federal elections, to give election officials and staff time to identify and address any issues that arise. It is also time to take the next step on bringing **no-excuse absentee voting** to the electorate for a vote.

Making it easier to vote does not diminish the preciousness of the right to vote. Rather, ease of voting allows more eligible voters to enjoy that right and to fulfill their responsibilities as citizens of our state and nation. Nothing is gained by allowing barriers to voting to remain in place.

Making voting easy and safe is a boon to Connecticut's families. After practicing for years as a pediatrician, I can attest to the complex responsibilities that parents juggle to keep their families safe, healthy and happy. I advocate for early and no-excuse absentee voting because these provide options for easy and safe voting that can be incorporated into the busy daily lives of families.

Regarding **Early Voting**, I strongly urge you to:

- Include at least 14 days of early voting including at least two weekends, and early morning and evening hours.
- Make early voting available this year for all elections, including special elections, municipal elections and referendums.
- Provide sufficient funding to implement early voting for all eligible voters, with a minimum number of polling places based on the number of eligible voters. Early voting opportunities must be broad in order to provide access to all who want to vote early, for instance, those who work variable and/or unpredictable shifts or multiple jobs; those with childcare and other family caring responsibilities; and those who depend on others to get to polls.
- Provide voter education about the process and logistics of early voting options

Regarding **No Excuse Absentee Voting**

- The implementation of Early Voting DOES NOT address all barriers to voting. **No Excuse Absentee Voting** will surmount many of those remaining barriers: lack of transportation;

difficulty with mobility; fragile health requiring minimizing outside contact; attending college at a distance; and extremely unpredictable work and travel for work.

- It increased voter turnout during the early pandemic: 35% of 2020 CT ballots were absentee (over 650,000 voters) with less than 1% of ballots rejected – lowest in recent history.
- Adopt the proposed resolution for Connecticut to permit No-Excuse Absentee Voting—for a required second time by simple majority in both chambers during this 2023 legislative session. This cannot wait until a short 2024 legislative session with time constraints. Voters need to know right away if No-Excuse Absentee Voting will be on the statewide ballot in 2024.
- For all absentee voting, we must expand notification of voters whose absentee ballots may be rejected due to a defect so that voters can either correct the defect or vote in person.

Let's bring Connecticut forward to join the majority of states that allow and support early voting and no-excuse absentee voting.

I strongly support S.B. No. 1064, H.B. No. 5004, S.J. No. 29, H.J. No. 1, and H.B. No. 6693. I also conditionally support S.B. No. 1057.

Thank you,

Karen Edwards MD MPH
Stamford CT